

Lakeside Haven - learning to be a family again

My name is Laura; my children and I are survivors of family violence.

Learning how to be a family again after living so long with violence isn't easy, but the YWCA's Lakeside Haven retreat gave my children and I an opportunity to take a step back from the strain of our every day lives and start fresh. Throughout the different activities, and all the chances to share and grow together, we got a chance to become the strong family I always knew we were meant to be.

I truly believe that my family will never forget the time we shared there.

Before attending Lakeside Haven, I wouldn't have thought that simple activities such as singing around a campfire and bedtime could bring us closer together. During campfire, my kids - who are normally quiet and shy- were singing along and truly enjoying themselves. As I sat between them, I felt so proud that they were opening up, relaxing and letting go. At bedtime, as we all waited for sleep, my teenagers who typically don't speak to each other much, were sharing their stories from the day with one another. It was so good hearing them talk in the darkness, I felt a part of the weight of our past lift from my shoulders.

My kids were excited to try kayaking, archery and other outdoor activities; I was happy they had the opportunity to try new things. My son loved YoWoChAs so much, that he's already told me he wants to go to the YWCA youth summer camp next year!

The staff at Lakeside Haven made sure my children and I felt safe and welcome, treating us as if we were family - they even helped me celebrate my birthday by baking me a cake. The cake was great, but being able to bond with my children in a beautiful, safe and stress-free place was the best birthday present I've ever received.

YWCA's **Lakeside Haven** is a retreat program run twice yearly at our YoWoChAs Outdoor Education Centre on beautiful Lake Wabamun. Families are encouraged to participate in bonding and trust building activities, while trying new things in a safe, welcoming environment. Crisis counsellors are also onsite to provide services to the families in need.

